The Admission of Students

A2.5 Policy on the Use of Contextual Data in Admissions

The University makes use of the contextual data provided by UCAS in relation to applicants through that scheme. The University employs the contextual data provided by UCAS specifically to improve inclusivity, by recognising potential assessed using evidence-based criteria.

The intention of the use of the UCAS contextual data is to provide fairness and equality of opportunity to all applicants by ensuring that adequate steps are taken to address differences between applicants, including differences in their experience of educational opportunities. A level of performance which is exceptional in its context may indicate outstanding ability, motivation and potential, and we will take this into account when assessing the varying performance of candidates. This data will never be used to the disadvantage of an individual applicant but may be used in the limited circumstances described below to vary our typical offers.

The following principles and statements of intent apply to the use of contextual data in the admissions process:

1. All data is applied individually to each applicant ensuring thereby that they are considered on their own merit, and not as part of a wider group.
2. There are no quotas for recruiting students from any particular background. (The University does have agreed milestones with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) for the recruitment, retention and performance of students from a range of backgrounds but these are not employed as quotas in the admissions process.)
3. The data is used only to complement and enhance existing selection mechanisms, including the consideration of academic qualifications, and not to replace these methods.
4. Contextual data is used as part of the overall consideration of an applicant and not in isolation; a combination of various items of contextual data are used in order to arrive at an holistic assessment of the applicant’s potential for the programme for which they have applied. Contextual data informs but does not over-rule the process of professional judgement which ultimately decides whether an offer is made.
5. All admissions staff using contextual data in decision making are briefed fully and made aware of the issues surrounding contextual data to ensure that they understand, and can interpret and use the data appropriately.
6. We rigorously monitor our use of contextual data.

The use of contextual data does not result in either an automatic offer of a place or a lower offer to a candidate. Where the holistic assessment of an individual candidate, through the evidence of the contextual data, indicates that differential treatment is justified, due to the evidence provided by that data, then the University may respond in two ways.

1. A lower offer than the advertised lowest typical offer may be issued to the candidate. In such circumstances, the offer will no be no more than one grade at A level lower in up to two separate A levels (or equivalent in other qualifications). For example, if the advertised lowest typical offer is AAB at A level, then an offer no lower than BBB or ABC may be issued.
2. Where a candidate does not meet the level of academic achievement normally expected of successful candidates, then an offer may be issued to a candidate at the advertised lowest typical offer where they otherwise might have been unsuccessful in their application. This will only apply to candidates whose achievement is no lower than one grade at A level in up to two separate A levels (or equivalent in other subjects).

The University will keep its policy for the use of contextual data under review and update this policy statement when changes are agreed. In doing so, the University will refer to relevant
external reference points such as the SPA Principles on the Use of Contextual Data in Admissions.

Matthew Andrews
Academic Registrar
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